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## THE EDUCATIONAL THEORY OF SOCIAL PROGRESS

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CIVILIZATION is essentially an acquired trait. Its basis is the accumulation of a mass of habits which are transmitted from generation to generation through custom and tradition. Each generation has therefore to acquire this ever-increasing mass of habits which make up human culture. So far as we know, biological selection can do nothing more than equip individuals with hereditary powers and capacities to acquire this mass of habits from their social environment. There is no evidence which would warrant us in believing that the children born in the most advanced civilization are inherently more civilized than the children born under the most primitive conditions. They are simply born in a more favorable environment in which social machinery aids them to take up the habits, knowledge, standards and values of the civilization which surrounds them. It follows from these simple statements that the methods of continuing and developing human social life in its cultural phases must be essentially of an educational nature.

The educational nature of the social life process would seem to demand, accordingly, more serious consideration than has usually been accorded to it by most sociologists. Whole volumes have been written on social progress with scarcely a mention of educative processes. On the other hand, educators surely need to realize, even more than they have done, that in dealing with education they are treating of a most essential and vital phase of the social life process, and that education has always been and must remain the main method of social progress. Gratifying advances have been made in this direction within the last few years, both by educators and sociologists; but something still remains to be done to bring together and to coordinate the results in both fields. It is the purpose of this paper to endeavor to make a contribution in this direction by considering education as a means of social development and progress.

It should be stated at the outset in discussing the educational theory of social progress that education is to be con-

sidered as a method, not as a cause, of progress. The causes of progress undoubtedly lie in the stimuli in the environment and in the nature of the human individual. To acknowledge this, however, is in no way to detract from the importance of education in the theory of social progress. For in all practical sciences the question of method becomes of as great importance as the question of cause. It is the expansive power of steam which causes the engine to run; but the efficiency of the engine will depend very largely upon the method by which this natural force is controlled and applied in any particular case. So it matters not whether we decide that the causes of progress lie in the stimuli in the environment, or in the energies wrapped up within the individual, or in both; the question of how these causes can be made to work most effectively and harmoniously still remains to be settled.

Our thesis is that the active factors in progress can be most advantageously, economically and effectively controlled in human society by the educative process. We mean by the educative process the whole process of controlling the formation of habit and character, of ways of thinking and ways of acting, in the individual. Formal education, to be sure, may be only a very small part of this process; but, as social evolution has advanced, there has been more and more a tendency to make this process one of conscious and intelligent control. It is of course the process as conscious and intelligent which we take as our norm usually when we discuss education as a means of social progress. Nevertheless, it should not be forgotten that the more intelligent and highly conscious phases of the process have sprung out of less intelligent and less conscious phases of the same process in the course of social evolution. Education in this respect only illustrates what is true of all phases of our social life; namely, that there is an increasing tendency to bring them into consciousness and under the control of intelligence as social evolution advances. It should be needless to remark, furthermore, that the school is not the only institution in which the educative process has been brought under a high degree of conscious control. The home, the church, the press, the public address, illustrate in hardly less degree conscious efforts at controlling the formation of habit and character, ways of thinking and of acting, in the individual. In a more narrow and specialized way, the same thing is true of other social institutions, such as the shop, the factory and the market-place. Wherever we have the use of artificial means of controlling the formation of habit and character in individuals,

we have an educative process. The school, perhaps, has become, in the latest phases of social evolution, the central institution concerned with the educative process; and in so far as it can succeed in coordinating all of the other educational agencies in human society, to that extent what we say of education as a means of social progress will be true of the school also.

The idea of human progress being essentially a process of education is a very old one. We find it first, perhaps, clearly enunciated in Augustine's "City of God." But, it did not become a favorite way of looking at social development until the eighteenth century, when we find such writers as Turgot, Lessing and Herder frequently setting it forth. These writers are usually represented to have developed merely an interesting analogy. They are represented merely as saying that history is the development of the species brought about through the course of instruction which nature affords! This, however, is an unfair representation of the thought of these writers. Rather, it is more clearly expressed in the aphorism of Paley, "All the generations of men are like one man, ever living and ever learning." While the continuity between the generations is here represented to be much closer than it really is, still the meaning is clear enough. History is represented as a process of self-development, the self-development of humanity instead of the individual. It is a learning process, a process in which experience is accumulated and consolidated in the social group, much as it is in the individual mind. In Turgot's famous essay on "The Successive Advances of the Human Mind" progress is thus shown to be the organic principle of human history. Each generation accumulates experience and passes it on to the next in the form of knowledge, standards and values. Thus, as experience is accumulated, and as the race learns through experience, progress is bound to result. Just as the individual grows in wisdom and in character through the experiences of life, so the race is bound to develop. Turgot recognized, however, that there were times of moral and intellectual decadence, but these he contended were not in contradiction with his general principle. They were times when the wisdom of the past was neglected, or when some new situation rendered it inadequate, and mistaken choices were made which resulted in temporary retrogression. Thus, progress might be interrupted, but society was bound to learn from the very mistakes which it made, and in time these mistakes would be corrected, and thus progress resumed. From this, Turgot drew the optimistic conclusion, later developed by Condorcet, that progress was an inherent

principle in human history, and that it was destined to continue indefinitely in the future until human society was perfected.

Now the modern sociologist recognizes such a theory of progress to be altogether too simple, and so inadequate from the standpoint of modern science. Nevertheless, there are elements of truth in this eighteenth-century theory which may make it well worthy of further consideration and development by the sociologists of to-day. Both the cultural evolution of the past and the social progress of the future must be considered to be essentially learning processes. They are processes which involve, we shall endeavor to show, the accumulation of knowledge, standards and values and the imparting of these through educative processes to large masses of men in order to control habit and character.

Let us note to what degree this has been true of past social evolution. Human culture would have been impossible if man were not an animal with a prolonged period of immaturity, that is, with a prolonged plasticity which has enabled each individual to be modified in accordance with the requirements of the life of his group. But this is only saying that human civilization would have been impossible without the educability of the individual. The simplest beginnings of those higher adjustments which we call "culture," and which distinguish the social life of man from that of brutes, are not possible till knowledge and skill can be transmitted from one individual to another. Bit by bit the groups of primitive men acquired knowledge and skill and then transmitted them to succeeding generations by educative processes. This process of transmission is often represented as more unconscious and natural, as less artificial and formal, than we have a right to believe that it really was. For the most primitive groups which have survived to-day give instruction to their children in the making of tools, weapons and in other technological processes, as well as in moral and religious matters. Usually, indeed, skill along these several lines is kept up in a succession of individuals or of families who specialize in these directions. The continuity of human culture from the start, therefore, was maintained largely by educative processes, more or less deliberately undertaken as a means of preserving knowledge and habits which groups found to be of value.

In transmitting the knowledge, standards and values upon which their culture rested, primitive groups had, of course, no such formal institution as the school, although they did make use, to some extent, of formal ceremonies, such as initiation

rites and the like. But for the most part, the basic elements in their culture were imparted by the two primary human groups, the family and the horde, or the neighborhood group. These two groups have indeed been the chief bearers of cultural traditions in all ages. They are still the chief agencies for social education. The education which they impart is by no means to be thought of as like the habituation of the individual to his physical environment. On the contrary, there is constant pressure on the child, in both the family and neighborhood groups, whether in savagery or in civilization, to make him conform his habits, his ways of thinking and of acting, to those of his group. The process is really an educational one, though the methods are not so formal as those employed in the school. But there is the constant artificial control of the formation of habit and character, which, as we have already said, is the distinguishing mark of the educative process.

If continuity in social development was secured in human groups from the start largely by educative processes, it is no less true that changes have always been brought about also largely through such processes. The most significant changes for the better in human society have been undoubtedly due to the processes of invention and discovery. Conditions in the environment have been the stimuli for these inventions and discoveries, but the inventions and discoveries themselves must be considered the real means by which civilization has developed. Now, inventions and discoveries are notoriously the work of a relatively few individuals in human groups, and their utilization by the whole group is brought about by the other members of the group being taught how to make use of them. From the simplest stone implement to the latest automobile, most men have had to learn how to utilize or copy the inventions of the exceptional mind. The whole process of generalizing the use of an invention is, therefore, a process of education. But this is true, not merely in the material realm, but also in the realm of human relationships. New modes of associating and cooperating are invented as well as new tools and machines. Forms of government, law, magic and religion are also, more or less, matters of invention. They have to be diffused also through educative processes, and this is largely the significance of many of the ceremonial usages which attach themselves to those institutions.

A high degree of conscious purpose must not, of course, be attributed to those educative methods which are made use of to spread and perpetuate in social groups new inventions and dis-

coveries, whether these be in the technological or in the more strictly social realm. In the case of those mass adjustments which are made by the group as a whole, however, a higher degree of consciousness enters. Collective conscious changes are made in human groups largely through processes of intercommunication, discussion of ideas and the formation of group opinion. All of this may be justly characterized as a sort of reciprocal educative process conducted by the members of the group among one another. Discussion results in the group gradually discriminating the various factors involved in a situation, in an evaluation of those factors, and in the selection of some of them as a basis for a new adjustment. Social discussion, in other words, is largely a mutually educative process for a group. It brings forth, as Bagehot insisted, the best intelligence of the group and centers it upon the solution of the difficulty. In this way a group opinion is reached, that is, a more or less rational judgment which all the members of the group come to accept whether it represents their individual judgment or not. The power of the pressure of such a group opinion is a commonplace in all reflection upon social matters, and it is obvious that it also acts upon the individual in essentially an educational way.

Thus, it is evident that social evolution in the past, so far as it has been brought in any degree under conscious control, has proceeded essentially by the method of education, and that there is good ground for agreement with the dictum of Thomas Davidson that education is the last and highest method of social evolution. Formal education, the school, is simply the attempt to give this method the highest degree of intelligent direction and control. The formation and preservation of a social tradition, the development of what we call "the social mind" and "social consciousness," all imply educative processes. Civilization itself is the production, transmission and diffusion of the knowledge, standards and values by which men have learned to regulate their conduct. These can not be handed down from generation to generation without educational processes to preserve and transmit them; neither can they be greatly modified or changed for the better without such processes. All the generations of men have been accumulating the results of tested experience. Each succeeding generation has been able to do a little more than its predecessors because it has learned all that has resulted from the experience of the past and it is usually able to add a little to the store of tested experience. If conservation of past knowledge and values in

human society were perfect, it is true, as Paley said, that all the generations of men would be like one man ever learning.<sup>1</sup>

It follows that it is the greater or less degree of failure of the educative process which is the immediate cause of periods of moral and intellectual decadence in human society. The failure of the educative process means the failure of the individuals to get proper adjustment to the social life. In every case disintegrative social processes are rooted in the failure to control habits, and so mental and moral character, in individuals. Of course, back of the failure of the educative process to socialize the individual always lie certain general conditions in society which may be regarded as the remoter causes of social disintegration. These are usually social disturbances, such as war, class strife and the development of luxury. War and class strife directly interfere with the educative process, since they divert the energy of the social group to the socially non-productive uses of conflict; while luxury undermines the educative process through relaxing social standards. The failure of the school in the higher phases of civilization to socialize the individual becomes an especially serious matter, since on account of the complexity of social conditions the education afforded by the primary social groups, the family and the neighborhood, is usually quite inadequate. In the higher phases of social life the work of differentiated and specialized educational institutions, therefore, becomes of supreme importance for progressive social evolution.

It is evident that the educative process lies at the heart of cultural evolution and so of human social development. It has been the means by which the civilization of the past has developed. It must be our main reliance for social progress in the future. Those who put faith in other means of social progress, such as revolutions, are destined to be grievously disappointed. Revolutions have swept away obstacles to social progress, but they have never succeeded in effecting permanent progress except as they have been preceded or followed by processes of education. It was the great merit of the late Professor Lester F. Ward that he demonstrated once for all that education is the initial means, and must remain our main reliance, for progress in human society.<sup>2</sup> Ward saw clearly that the social life of man is of the nature of a developing

<sup>1</sup> The part played by educative processes in social continuity and social change will be found more elaborately described in the writer's recent work, "An Introduction to Social Psychology."

<sup>2</sup> See his "Dynamic Sociology," Vol. II., Chaps. X.-XIV.



"social mind"; that to control action, we must control opinions, beliefs, ideas and standards. Ward's conception of education, was, to be sure, narrow. He believed that the diffusion of information would in itself suffice to give rise to dynamic opinions, ideas and actions; so that social progress would automatically result from the diffusion of knowledge. But we now see that while "knowledge is power," it is a power that may be used in many different ways; and that only as it is socially directed will progress result from it. Hence, a more socialized conception of education is necessary, to see clearly its power as a factor in progress, than that which Ward gave.

If we accept, however, the broader and more socialized definition of education worked out by scientific educationists, namely, that education is the artificial control of the formation of habits and character in the individual in order to fit him to participate efficiently in the social life, then we may cordially agree with Ward that the key to progress lies in education. For progress is determined by the psychic adjustment of individuals to the social life, by the "social attitudes" which they maintain toward one another. Now, the psychic adjustment of the individual to the social life, in so far as it is not a matter of heredity—and we have already seen that there is little warrant for believing that heredity furnishes anything more than normal human powers and capacities—is obviously a result of his environment. We must have a properly controlled environment for the individual to develop in, therefore, if we wish to develop in him desirable social attitudes. If properly carried out, personal education should furnish to the developing individual such a properly controlled environment; and inasmuch as it furnishes such an environment at the plastic period of life, it is the most subtle and effective form of social control that can be devised. It can secure more difficult forms of social adjustment than can any other human agency. We mean by a properly controlled environment, of course, not simply a physical environment, but even more, a psychic environment of proper ideas, ideals, standards and values. Even the most civilized nations of the earth have only just begun to use education in this sense, as an instrument of social progress. Let us see what it might do if radically carried out.

In the first place, it could make a normal individual many times more efficient socially than he is at the present time. It could not only give him information, knowledge and skill which would make him a useful member of society in general and fit him for vocational excellence in some line for which he is found

by his nature to be best fitted, but it could give him an entirely different attitude toward the institutions and agencies by which social order is maintained and social life carried on. It could give him, for example, a positive and social view of his government, so that he would not look upon it as a mere repressive agency designed to curtail his individual liberty. It could give him a more constructive attitude toward the family, the school and the neighborhood, so that he would more readily cooperate with others in seeking to bring about conditions favorable to social welfare. If the negative attitude of the individual toward such social institutions, which is perhaps prompted largely by his native egoism, could be overcome, that alone would make greatly toward increased social efficiency and progress.

In the second place, such an education could make much more harmonious the relations between individuals. It is just at this point, perhaps, that the education of the nineteenth century failed most completely. This was because it was so highly individualistic; it laid much more stress upon individual initiative and success than upon social service. We are now beginning to see that it may be possible for us to secure a higher degree of social service from the individual without sacrificing his individual initiative and success. If we make the individual more efficient in cooperating with his fellows, whether in the family, in the school, in the community, or in the nation at large, we need not thereby be subtracting anything from those personal qualities which make for individual initiative and successful performance of undertakings. Rather, we are thereby simply transforming individual achievement into collective achievement, which is the substance of social progress. It is idle to say that moral education of the most idealistic sort can not be given in the public school. The social values contained in our moral ideals can be as well taught in the public school, if our education is given a social direction, as any other part of the curriculum. That the ideals of justice, brotherhood and the service of mankind can not be taught in our public schools as easily as the ideals of business efficiency, vocational excellence or commercial success is absurd.

The one thing which is evidently needed to make our educational system an instrument of true social progress, is that it should be more thoroughly socialized. Social service must become the watchword of the school. The knowledge and training which it furnishes should be given a social direction. Education is simply an effective means for the social manipulation and control of ideas, standards, values, of habits of think-

ing and of acting; but if all this is not done with a social end in view, it is quite evident that nothing could so easily destroy the social institutions which conserve civilization, and even civilization itself, as education. It is just because education is such a power for either social good or social evil that we must see that it is rightly directed socially. Nor is there any danger that this will fasten a clamp upon individual development. For the measure of socialization is how far an individual's ideas, habits and character contribute to the increased harmony, efficiency and happiness of mankind as a whole; and an individual development in any other direction than this will surely not profit either the individual or his group permanently. Education becomes a stumbling block to social progress, not when it is given a truly social, that is, a humanitarian direction, but when it is made an individualistic, class or group matter; when, in other words, it fails to inculcate social service in the broadest sense of that phrase.

But we are told that education can not change the "mores"; that rather it is the "mores" of a group which determine what education shall be. Such a conclusion, however, is utterly unwarranted from human experience. In all ages, education has been more or less successful in changing the "mores." We need only take a single example for illustration from our own time. The temperance movement in modern society has been essentially an educational movement. Its success in its war against alcohol has been dependent upon more or less scientific instruction, regarding the physiological and social effects of the use of alcoholic beverages, in our public schools. In other words, without any radical changes in external conditions, but simply through the inculcation in the young of standards and habits corresponding to scientific conclusions concerning the effects of alcohol, the most progressive modern societies seem about to sweep away the use, if not of all, at least of the stronger alcohol beverages, in spite of the fact that the "mores" connected with the use of such beverages were defended by privilege and by vested interests. Hundreds of similar illustrations of the social effects of education might easily be cited from the history of civilization.

The peculiarly encouraging thing suggested by this illustration, however, is that such social effects were brought about by *education based upon scientific knowledge*. So too, if we inculcate social ideals regarding government, law, sanitation and morality, for example, upon the basis of scientific knowledge, we may surely expect them to have an equally great social

effect. The trouble with much of the moral and social instruction in our schools in the past is that it has been divorced too much from the facts of our social life. But these facts are now accumulating, becoming scientifically organized and generalized, and there is good reason for believing that by focusing such scientific conclusions upon the minds of a developing generation, we can secure an era of social progress such as the world has hitherto scarcely dreamed of. The scientific program of accumulating and rationalizing knowledge, and then of socially organizing and directing the use of such knowledge, as a basis for furthering social progress, is not a chimerical one.

But several things will have to be done by our public school system before education can become the powerful instrument of social progress which it should be. In the first place, more attention will have to be given to the finding and training of social leaders than has yet been given. Nothing great is accomplished in human society without leadership; and advances in a high civilization depend upon finding and training leaders along many lines. The higher institutions of education should be especially charged with this function. They are making a beginning, to be sure, in western civilization in finding and training leaders along a number of lines; but the general field of social leadership they are still largely neglecting. They are producing experts in law and medicine, in agriculture and engineering, but experts in dealing with the larger problems of human living together very rarely; yet these latter are the ones most needed. The superior society of the future, in other words, must be produced just as we are to produce the superior engine. It must be produced by the trained, scientific mind that knows social facts and forces so that it can map out and plan a superior social organization. The superior individual and the superior society are not antitheses, but correlatives. Only our educational system must be brought to realize that social values are not carried by individuals alone or wholly wrapped up in the concept of personality; but that they are also carried by institutional forms and inhere in the larger social life. We must pay attention to the development of the individual and his personality; but we should do so remembering that that development is largely for the sake of society, that is to say the larger life of humanity.

Another thing which will have to be done by our public school system is to effect some sort of coordination between the school and other educational institutions. In the nature of things the school can furnish only a part of the education of

the child. But it should be the center of his education and should set the standard. The home and the church are scarcely less important educational institutions, and some way should be found of coordinating them with the school. In the more specialized phases of education the work of other institutions, such as the farm and the factory, should also be coordinated with that of the school. The school, in brief, needs to come into more vital connection with all other phases of the social life.

Finally, the public school system will have to make larger provision for direct instruction regarding social matters, if it is to become an effective instrument for social progress. Social progress, after all, depends at bottom on awakening and rationalizing social consciousness. The progress of society, even more than the development of the individual, comes through the growth of self-knowledge. Accordingly, our universities should make more provision for research along social lines; and our colleges and secondary schools should give more instruction in the social sciences. We can not have intelligent social service on the part of our citizens without their possessing social knowledge; and indeed they will lack even rational motive for such service without such knowledge. Social progress, then, obviously depends upon the perfecting and diffusion of scientific knowledge of society; and this last depends largely upon our educational system.

These commonplaces of educational and social science show that the general theory of Ward that education is the proximate means of social progress is sound; and that the view of those eighteenth-century social philosophers who held that education is the method of social advance is much more nearly correct than some views which have had vogue during the last few decades. After this war, it is to be hoped that we shall take up the work of socializing our system of education in earnest, as the sure foundation upon which we can build a worthy civilization for the future. For civilization is only just beginning. The work for rational and scientifically planned social progress lies all ahead. And socialized education is the key to such progress.